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SUBJECT: TOGO: PRESIDENT FAURE GNASSINGBE'S VISIT TO PARIS

REF: A. COTONOU 408
[1](#)B. COTONOU 420

Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew Young, 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Togo President Faure Gnassingbe's visit to Paris the week of November 17 was largely uneventful but allowed the two sides to touch base, and provided France the opportunity to remind Faure of the importance of carrying out democratic reform and holding meaningful dialogue with the opposition, notably Gilchrist Olympio's UFC. Faure told the French that he had to take care in treading a delicate path between "extremists" such as Olympio on one side, and "hardline" RPT elements on the other, and that the task was not always easy. Faure expressed concern about two problems -- Togo's involvement in drug trafficking (Faure praised cooperation with the USG on drugs) and the situation in Benin, concerning which he, along with other African leaders, were beginning to question some of President Boni Yayi's recent decisions. The French view Faure as having matured while in office and seem reasonably confident that he will do his best to implement reform in Togo. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Remi Marechaux, an AF Counselor at the French Presidency, on November 24 discussed Togo President Faure Gnassingbe's visit to Paris the previous week. He said that the visit had been scheduled to take place in 2009 but was moved up because a favorable time slot became available. Faure met with President Sarkozy on November 20. This event was, as to be expected, scripted, with Sarkozy expressing support for Faure's continued efforts to promote democracy in Togo. Both sides acknowledged progress Togo had made with the IFIs, notably the IMF and Paris Club, with Faure quite effusively thanking the French for their support and Sarkozy encouraging further progress on Togo's part, with continued GOF support in the offing.

Democratization and the Opposition

[1](#)3. (C) Marechaux said that the two sides delved deeper into current issues when Marechaux and Bruno Joubert, President Sarkozy's Deputy Diplomatic Advisor and Marechaux's direct boss, called on Faure at his hotel. The French again encouraged Faure to continue democratization efforts in Togo and to reach out to the opposition in an effort at inclusiveness. Faure said that he was committed to Togo's continuing democratization, noting the successful legislative elections that had taken place and his hope that those elections augured well for the next presidential election. However, Faure told the French that he felt squeezed -- on the one hand, the opposition, and notably Gilchrist Olympio (UFC), were "extremists" who did not seem to have much willingness to compromise. On the other hand, Faure felt himself pressured by the RPT "hardline" that did not want to see him making any concessions to the opposition. Marechaux said that Faure was quite explicit in identifying his half-brother Kpatcha as being part of the "hardline group" that was, in Faure's words, "always ready to stab me in the back," although Marechaux said that Faure was speaking more figuratively than literally.

¶4. (C) Marechaux said that Faure indicated to the French that Gilchrist Olympio never seemed satisfied, always rejecting whatever Faure might offer and always pressing for more. Marechaux said that he agreed in part with Faure in the sense that Olympio was tactically inept, always rejecting the current proposal and at the same time expressing regret that he had not agreed to the previous one. "This seems to be his invariable pattern," Marechaux observed, "and he always ends up being out of step." There was therefore no real movement on the opposition's part to engage with the government, even though Faure seemed willing to bargain. Marechaux, while not praising Faure, said that he could understand some of his frustrations with Olympio and the opposition more generally. Marechaux regretted that Olympio seemed to be so much a prisoner of the past and the history of the Olympio and Gnassingbe families, although he understood how difficult it must be for Olympio to deal with Togo's president, the son of the man who killed his father.

Narcotics

¶5. (C) Marechaux said that Faure, in his meeting with Joubert and Marechaux, confided that he was quite troubled by Togo's apparent involvement in narcotics trafficking, even if Togo served mainly as a transit point and not a locus of consumption. Marechaux said that Faure highly praised anti-narcotics assistance provided by the USG, especially documentary evidence that demonstrated Togolese involvement in trafficking. Marechaux said that Faure showed a list based on USG-supplied information that named senior members of Togo's military as being involved in the drug trade.

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Marechaux said that he and Joubert encouraged Faure to take action against the traffickers and that this was not a "victimless crime," even if the drugs simply passed through Togo. Trafficking was a very insidious, dangerous, and corrupting influence on any country, and the French urged Faure to be wary. They said that France would be willing to help sensitize Togolese in positions of influence to this reality.

Benin

¶6. (C) Faure was also concerned about Benin, which he said he believed was sliding downward. Marechaux told us that the French as well were concerned about Benin and, more specifically, the issue of President Yayi's leadership. Marechaux said that Yayi's political coalition seemed to be coming undone (as reflected in reftels) and that Yayi himself was not acting very constructively with respect to his erstwhile political allies. Marechaux noted what he described as another disturbing development -- Yayi seemed to be engaging in ethnic and regional politicking within Benin, which Marechaux said was not a wise move. Marechaux said that these were among the Benin-related topics Faure asked to discuss with the French. Marechaux observed that concern about Benin was acute because Benin was among the "success stories" in Africa and that backsliding on its part would be a particular disappointment because it had risen relatively far. Marechaux said that Presidents Compaore (Burkina Faso) and Bongo (Gabon) had also raised Benin with the French, the latter reportedly via a recent long telephone conversation with the French Presidency. (NOTE: It was unclear from Marechaux's comments whether Bongo spoke to Sarkozy or another official at the Presidency. END NOTE.).

Assessment of Faure

¶7. (C) When asked, Marechaux said that the French had a generally favorable impression of Faure and believed that he had significantly matured since becoming President. He was not a prisoner of the past and seemed open minded and committed to the reformist path that was Togo's only way out. Marechaux was much impressed by Faure's willingness to

acknowledge Togo's drug problem and the apparent involvement of certain senior military figures. He was also impressed by Faure's open acknowledgment of the difficulties posed by Kpatcha and the other hardliners. Marechaux said that "maybe Faure has turned out to be a bit better than we had any reason to expect him to be." That said, Marechaux indicated that he had few illusions about the challenges facing Faure and Togo. But he seemed relieved that Faure, so far, was an improvement on his father.

STAPLETON